Landscapes of Change

Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Edited by
Neil Christie

LANDSCAPES OF CHANGE

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Landscapes of Change

Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Edited by
NEIL CHRISTIE
University of Leicester, UK

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2004 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.
1. Land settlement patterns—Europe—History—to 1500. 2. Sociology, Rural—Europe—History—to 1500. 3. Historical agricultural landscapes—Europe. I. Christie, Neil.
307.7'2'094'09021

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages / edited by Neil Christie.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Landscape changes—History. 2. Landscape assessment—History. 3. Land settlement patterns—History. 4. Cities and towns, Ancient. 5. Cities and towns, Medieval. 6. Civilization, Medieval. I. Christie, Neil.
GF90.L383 2003
307.72'094–dc22 2003058369

ISBN 9781840146172 (hbk)

Typeset by Owain Hammonds, Ceredigion.

Contents

List of Figures

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Notes on Contributors

Paul Arthur obtained both his BA and his PhD at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. In the 1980s he worked extensively in Naples and taught at the University of Salerno. Since 1998 he has been Professor in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Lecce. He is also an Associate Editor of the journal *Medieval Archaeology*. His fieldwork has included excavations and surveys in England, Italy, Libya, Turkey and the Ukraine. Research interests cover late antique and medieval/Byzantine settlement patterns and economy, cultural heritage management and ceramics, both medieval and *art nouveau*. The British School at Rome has recently published his volume *Naples from Roman Town to City-State: An Archaeological Perspective* (2002).

William Bowden received his BA from University College London and his PhD from the University of East Anglia. He currently holds a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of East Anglia. His previous employment includes extensive experience of British rescue archaeology and Italian archaeology, much of the latter working for the British School at Rome. He is actively involved in research projects at Butrint in southern Albania and Jerash in Jordan and his research interests include late antique urbanism and the use of the past in the construction of ancient and modern identities. His recent publications include *Epirus Vetus: The Archaeology of a Late Antique Province* (2003) and the co-edited volume *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology* (Brill, 2003).

Alexandra Chavarría Arnau studied archaeology at the University of Barcelona and at the University of Paderborn where she has recently completed her PhD on the *Functional Transformation of Spanish Villas in Late Antiquity* (2003); she is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Padova. She has participated in many surveys and excavations in Germany, France, and Spain as well as in Italy where she has also analysed historical constructions using the methodology of the Archaeology of Architecture. Her research and publication interests lie in *Hispania* during the late antique period in general and particularly in residential (urban and rural) and Christian architecture.

Neil Christie completed his BA and PhD at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne before receiving a British School at Rome scholarship to study 'Byzantine Liguria'. In Rome he also undertook publication of the 1960s excavations of the papal church and monastery of Santa Cornelia. Further research on late Roman and early medieval Italian archaeology was pursued in a Sir James Knott Fellowship at Newcastle and British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship at Oxford. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Leicester. Previous fieldwork has examined castles and landscapes in central Italy. Publications include *The Lombards* (Blackwell, 1995) and the co-edited volumes *Towns in Transition* (Scolar, 1996) and *Towns and Their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Brill, 2001).

Ken Dark received a BA in archaeology from the University of York and a PhD from the University of Cambridge. He then taught at Oxford and Cambridge before moving to his present post at the University of Reading, where he is Director of the Research Centre for Late Antique and Byzantine Studies. He has published extensively on the archaeology and history of the 1st millennium AD in Europe and the Mediterranean and on archaeological theory and method. He has directed numerous excavation and survey projects and holds honorary professorships and fellowships from several EU and US universities. His most recent publications include *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Tempus, 2000) and *Byzantine Pottery* (Tempus, 2001).

Helena Hamerow received her BA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and her DPhil from the University of Oxford. Prior to becoming Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Oxford, she was the Mary Somerville Research Fellow at Somerville College, Oxford, and Lecturer in Early Medieval Archaeology at Durham University. Her research interests lie in the area of early medieval settlement studies. She is the author of *Mucking: The Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (English Heritage, 1993) and *Early Medieval Settlements: The Archaeology of Rural Settlements in Northwest Europe, 400–900* (OUP, 2002).

Richard Hodges graduated from Southampton University in archaeology and medieval history; he taught at Sheffield University from 1976–95, and was Director of the British School at Rome (1988–95) and Director of the Prince of Wales's Institute of Archaeology (1996–98) before founding the Institute of World Archaeology in the University of East Anglia, Norwich. He is currently involved in fieldwork projects in Albania, England, Italy and Turkey. Recent publications have included the *San Vincenzo al Volturno* monographs (British School at Rome and Centro di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo) and *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne* (Duckworth, 2000).

Anna Leone took her first degrees at the University of Turin and at the Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia at the University La Sapienza in Rome, and completed her PhD at the University at Leicester. She has worked in several excavations in central and southern Italy, and in North Africa, particularly in Carthage and in Libya (Fazzan). She is currently working as Research Assistant of the Professor of Roman Archaeology at the University of Oxford. Her research and publication interests focus mainly on Roman ceramics and problems related to the evolution of North African cities from Late Antiquity to the Arab conquest.

David Mattingly followed his BA and PhD (both at the University of Manchester) with a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford. He has subsequently taught at the University of Michigan and University of Leicester, where he is now Professor of Roman Archaeology. He has maintained a strong interest in North Africa throughout his career, being author of a monograph on *Tripolitania*, the province equivalent to north-west Libya, a co-author of *Farming the Desert. The UNESCO Libyan Valleys Archaeological Survey* and of two volumes of reports on the Tunisian coastal city of *Leptiminus*. His most recent project has been in southern Libya, concerning the Garamantes of Fazzan – southerly neighbours of the Roman empire in the central Sahara.

Patrick Périn gained his first degree and his doctorate at the Sorbonne (thesis title: *La Datation des Tombes Mérovingiennes. Historique, Méthodes, Applications* – 1980). He was Conservateur at the Archaeology Department of the Musée Carnavalet at Paris from 1971–84, and then Director of the Musées Départementaux de Seine-Maritime at Rouen from 1984–96; since 1996 he has been Director of the Musée des Antiquités Nationales (at the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye). He is also an Associated Professor in Archaeology and Early Medieval Art History at Paris I University (Panthéon-Sorbonne). He has overseen various excavations in the Ardennes (Merovingian cemeteries) and at Paris (including the Church of Saint-Pierre de Montmartre). Research interests focus on archaeological contributions to the history of the Merovingian period.

Andrew Poulter graduated with a BA in Ancient History and Archaeology from the University of Birmingham, then completed an MA by research before completing a PhD at University College, London University. After a year as a British Council scholar at the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest (Romania), he was Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Leeds before becoming Lecturer in Roman Archaeology at the University of Nottingham. He was director of *The British Archaeological Expedition to Bulgaria* (1985–92) (excavating the Roman to early Byzantine city of

Nicopolis ad Istrum in Bulgaria), director of *The Macedonia Research Programme* (Greece), surveying at Philippi and Pydna, then Director of *The Transition to Late Antiquity Programme* (1996–2002), carrying out field survey and excavation at Dichin. His research interests focus especially on the southern Balkans in the Late Roman and early Byzantine periods.

Guy Sanders received his BA from the University of Southampton, his MA from the University of Missouri, and his PhD from the Univerity of Birmingham. Prior to becoming the resident director of the Corinth excavations of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, he was employed as a land surveyor specializing in the reconstruction of Louisiana Purchase township surveys in the US mid-west and as assistant director of the British School at Athens. He has participated in many surveys and excavations in Portugal, Cyprus and Greece. His research and publication interests lie in late antique, medieval and post-medieval pottery and in historical and economic geography.

Sarah Scott studied archaeology at the Universities of Leicester and Oxford; after completing her DPhil on Fourth-Century Romano-British Villas and Mosaics, she spent two years at the University of Durham as Fellow in Social Sciences. Since 1995 she has been a Lecturer in Archaeology at Leicester University. She has published *Art and Society in Fourth-Century Roman Britain* (Oxford, 2000) and has edited, with Jane Webster, *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art* (CUP, 2003). Her current research considers the history of archaeological approaches to art.

Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume of edited papers can perhaps be best seen as a companion to *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by myself and Simon Loseby in 1996, and also published by Scolar/Ashgate. *Towns in Transition* offered a series of regional analyses of the material, physical and mental changes affecting urban centres in the period AD 300–800 as well as considering the diverse character of urbanism as it evolved and re-emerged in the latter part of the first millennium AD. In that volume, reference was often made to the landscape and to relationships between city, town, fort and country. This present volume therefore more fully addresses the evolution of the landscapes of the Roman world in the transitional period from late Roman to early medieval.

Landscapes of Change seeks a comparable spread of zones of study and tackles comparable themes of continuity and change: the impact of insecurity, the role of the Church, the reactions of farmers and landholders, the redefinition of settlement, the structures of living and perceptions of change. This volume draws together contributions from both young and established scholars and offers the results of new fieldwork as well as revised analyses of older data. In offering in particular synthetic reviews of regions, the range and diversity of change and continuity will hopefully be made apparent, alongside an awareness of directions of study and gaps in knowledge.

As with many an edited volume the contents have undergone their own evolution, due to changes in the list of contributors. I must thank all the contributors for their efforts and patience – especially those 'original' team members, but also those who volunteered late on to fill gaps (here I am especially grateful for Alexandra Chavarría Arnau's ability to produce a high quality paper on Spanish villas at the eleventh hour!). Contributors have of course had to cope with my editing and my apologies go out for any misunderstood deletions, expansions and queries. Emails and attachments have speeded up many an edit, whilst clogging up many an account. Just as importantly, I am endebted to the cool, calm efficiency of Ashgate's Senior Desk Editor for Humanities, Kirsten Weissenberg, for help, guidance and reassurance throughout.

My thanks for technical support within the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester from Debbie Miles-Williams

and especially Lucy Farr for illustrations and for scanning of images. Finally, on a personal level, the Christie family has suffered many an evening's keyboard tapping, alongside a dramatic consumption of tea bags; to my wife, Jane, therefore, I offer humble thanks for patience and chocolate.

Neil Christie
Leicester, May 2003

Chapter 1

Landscapes of Change in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Themes, Directions and Problems

Neil Christie

Introduction: Transformations

This volume offers a collection of new papers on a key theme in current historical archaeology: rural evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The period bridges the break-up and dispersal of Roman authority across much of the Mediterranean and European landscape and addresses the characterisation of farms, villages, rural exploitation and fortified sites resultant from the imposition or creation of new political and demographic powers and from related socio-economic changes. This volume is designed to span much of the old Roman world and to seek the variety of human landscapes that emerge between AD 350–750. We will be observing in these papers aspects of old and new, continuity and discontinuity, borrowings and impositions, as well as uncertainties and complexities.

The period in question was the focus of *The Transformation of the Roman World* programme sponsored by the European Science Foundation (ESF), whose series of conferences and workshops have resulted in the publication of an array of edited volumes focussed on themes such as *Strategies of Distinction* (Pohl, 1998), *The Sixth Century* (Hodges and Bowden, 1998), and *The Long Eighth Century* (Wickham and Hansen, 2000). The interdisciplinary nature of these workshops opened valuable dialogues between historians, archaeologists and art historians, and assisted greatly in reassessing the nature and level of changes that occurred with the *Transformation*. Political, religious and social changes and evolutions are particularly highlighted, as is the question of economic communication.

Archaeology contributes strongly to the debate on the evolving economy, and closely linked to this is the question of settlement and population. It is frequently assumed that the late Roman Empire witnessed a population fall, accelerated in the early medieval period through war and plague and marked not just in economic downturn but principally in a debilitated urbanism and a

diminished rural exploitation. Urbanism has been a theme of substantial debate for the Roman to early medieval transition since the 1990s, marked by publications such as *The City in Late Antiquity* (Rich, 1992), *Arguments in Stone* (Carver, 1993), *Towns in Transition* (Christie and Loseby, 1996) and, in the ESF series, *The Idea and Ideal of the Town* (Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, 1998) and *Towns and Their Territories* (Brogiolo *et al*., 2000). Two most recent volumes include *Recent Research in Late-Antique Urbanism* (Lavan, 2001) and *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (Burns and Eadie, 2001). Here debates are informed by new excavations in town centres such as Rome and Brescia in Italy, Valencia in Spain, or London and York in England, which particularly identify reuse and survival 'after Rome' even if at a seemingly impoverished level, with more crudely constructed houses (chiefly in timber or *spolia*), reduced economic and social expressions (for example, an absence/loss of mosaics, wall paintings, baths), and with a modified sense of urban roles (such as with the presence of intramural burial). Alongside such studies are re-evaluations of old excavations and refined chronologies for ceramics, helping to fill out what remain rather 'blank' spaces within the former Roman towns. Further, there is much better and fuller appreciation of the vital role of the Church in ordering and, indeed, in redefining townscapes with new foci of patronage, social attention, and even economic activity. Finally, there is a healthier dialogue between West and East in terms of archaeologies and histories: the decay often recognised in late Roman towns in the West is much delayed in the Roman/Byzantine East, where civic expression and urban and rural prosperity generally endure well into the sixth century (see Banaji, 2001). Understanding the divergences promotes a sharper awareness of the levels of change and loss across the ancient world.

Towns and Territories

Townscapes and their populations were (and are) of course closely bound up with their hinterlands, territories, road links, landscapes and fields, woods, rivers and other natural resources: raw materials for buildings, communications between communities, trade activity, and, most essentially, food were all drawn and intimately connected with the surrounding landscape. Effectively, towns were required to function in unison with the countryside. As yet, synthetic volumes dedicated to the analysis of the late antique landscapes of the Roman world have been lacking (although proceedings from the 2002 Paris and Oxford meetings of the *Late Antique Archaeology* conference series, on the theme of the 'Late Antique Countryside', will do much to fill this current gap). Nonetheless, various of the volumes cited above offer papers which touch on this relationship (notably in *Towns and Their Territories* and in *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts*), and these have clearly

indicated that there is often no simple equation of 'busy countryside = busy urbanism'. Certainly in the heyday of Rome, in the early Empire, towns were expansive, active, and foci of social display (cf. Perkins and Nevett, 2000), and a burgeoning urban aristocracy was accordingly demanding of the lands around (and well beyond); in this context, the landscape is generally abundant in small to large farmsteads, working sites, slave-worked estates, holiday villas and the like, and with experimentation on crops, land clearance and drainage operations duly attested in our documentary sources (see, in general, Lloyd, 1991, stressing the variety). The results of the extended fieldwalking project immediately north of Rome, the South Etruria Survey (summarised in Potter, 1979 – even if now undergoing revision in the light of enhanced dating of fine and coarse ware ceramics), are fairly typical in displaying through distribution plots a highly exploited landscape north of Rome, closely linked to main roads and with an emphasis for many working units to be in 'commuting' distance of the demanding City. A similar pattern of energetic urban-related exploitation is witnessed in Roman Britain, even if not on the same scale materially as in Italy or elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Frequently, also, there is recognition of a good level of continuity from pre-Roman into Roman land use and settlement, but with a heightened density overall, combined with a highly visible industrial exploitation, suggesting the Empire as more than 'stepping up a few gears' from the previous levels of activity (cf. Corney, 2000: 37, 39), to supply the cities as concentrated points of human interaction.

Whilst documents and monumental buildings predominate in the urban context to provide a fairly coherent and tangible guide to the evolving urban form and its society, the countryside in many ages remains rather shadowy, a context for the cultivation, gathering and movement of food and other resources, and inhabited by farmers, villagers and miners. The late Republic and early imperial centuries are adequately served through occasional extant remains and through excavation of villas and farmsteads; arguably, also, at least for the central Mediterranean we have the writings of agronomists as well as poets, to comment on the business and the beauty of the landscape, on fine wines and fish preferences. Syria, Egypt and parts of North Africa (notably Carthage's territory) are well served by epigraphic and literary/papyrological texts and these allow us to chart villages and even products – although often the marrying of textual and archaeological data is problematic (Vallat, 1991: 11–13). But we cannot always extend this documented image far: rural Roman Britain, for example, is almost a void in terms of text, land records, details of ownership, etc. (Dark and Dark, 1997; Corney, 2000: 37–8). Here, therefore, archaeology plays a vital role in identifying and reconstructing landscape settlement and evolution.

Landscape Archaeology: Impacts

A virtual explosion of data and interest in landscape analysis has come through the extensive adoption of landscape archaeology techniques – field survey and air photography particularly – combined with geomorphological assessment, environmental sampling, ethnographic survey, etc., to study beyond individual sites and to understand human impacts across wide areas and regions (Barker, 1991, 1995) (Fig. 1.1). The Roman period is one that can be gauged relatively coherently through the production and availability of far-flung trading items such as amphorae, fine wares, and lamps, matched by local/regional production of imitations or distinctive 'home' wares (Millett, 1991). Such ceramics offer key chronological guides to periods of site occupancy at least, and strong indications of origins and ends to individual units. Problems exist, of course: these guides derive, generally, from the surface of fields walked and sampled and provide no guarantee of an accurate reflection of all materials and periods related to a given buried (or destroyed) site. As with coins, the currency and longevity of ceramic types is extremely variable, although not to the degree that they fail to provide valuable indicators. Excavation is frequently needed to fine-tune chronologies and to glean fuller data regarding site function and format. Nonetheless, the application of such techniques over wide areas such as the Biferno Valley in central Italy (Barker, 1995; Lloyd, 1995), the *ager Tarraconensis* in eastern Spain (Keay, 1991) and the Libyan Valleys (Mattingly *et al*., 1996), has enabled archaeologists and historians to obtain a vastly more populated image of the Roman world.

Landscape archaeology is not an exact science or discipline: there is no single all-embracing methodology; results are dependent on sampling strategy, survivability of material cultures, field experience even; landscape evolution (alluviation, colluviation, reforestation, dam building, etc.) may mask much key archaeology; interpretations are never straightforward; emphases within projects may skew results to a given period; and poor levels of publication may counter the usefulness of any results (cf. Williamson, 1994). Certain periods are better served – the classical, as noted, has a busy and well-produced and thus eminently visible material culture. In Britain, as elsewhere, the early medieval centuries are typified by a much reduced material culture, technologically more 'domestic', damaging the chances of survival through centuries of plough action and weathering. In addition, quantities of such materials in active use were by then much reduced, linked to a recognised population decline for the period AD 400–900 (a very crude indicator being the City of Rome, whose population in AD 100 numbered one million, but by AD 500 may have been as low as 250 000 and by AD 650 perhaps no more than 50 000). For early Saxon Britain and early post-Roman Europe we instead know far more of burial populations than working, farming

populations. When we progress to the medieval period (AD 1000–1500) the picture fills out once more, but that is often due more to the fact that documents resume on adequate levels and that we gain standing and visible archaeology – existing villages, churches, towns, plus ruinous castles, monasteries, manors, etc. Here there is less 'need' to explain the countyside since we can pinpoint so much more of the settlement pattern through text; not surprisingly, therefore, many landscape survey projects often fail to extend properly into the medieval and later worlds.

The intervening early medieval centuries are, however, a current focus of interest and debate: their greyness and material problems have been spurs to seek and identify sites and people in the landscape and to question images of decay and loss and thence medieval revival. Arguably, the South Etruria Survey was instrumental in this, part tied into British involvement in developing early medieval archaeologies: hence Tim Potter's work at Monte Gelato north of Rome, examining churches and caves on a former Roman villa site (Potter and King, 1997); Richard Hodges' projects first at San Vincenzo (for example, Hodges, 1997) and since at/around the town of Butrint in Albania (Hodges *et al*., 2000); Andrew Poulter's studies along the lower Danube focussed on Nicopolis ad Istrum (2000); Colin Haselgrove's Aisne valley survey in Picardy (Haselgrove and Scull, 1995); and a major, ongoing project based on Italy's Tiber valley (Patterson and Millett, 1998). In many instances, notably the San Vincenzo project, extensive historical research has informed the landscape analyses, often in fact pinpointing early medieval sites which are either buried beneath later settlement or which cannot easily be located archaeologically (that is, by conventional fieldwalking methods) (Wickham, 1995; Hodges, 1997: 176–200; cf. Leggio and Moreland, 1986 for Farfa, also central Italy). The last two decades in particular, however, have seen a major national take-up of landscape archaeology across Europe and, accordingly, valuable syntheses are emerging on a regular basis (for Italy see, for example, contributions in Christie, ed., 1995; for Gaul, key are van Ossel, 1992, *Les Campagnes*, 1994, and van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000; for Spain, papers in Díaz-Andreu and Keay, 1996).

Chronologies

Chronologies are a key problem. Literary texts, whether charters, sale documents, wills and transfers, which inform us of the landscape and of towns and their inhabitants, tend to surface in usable numbers only from the ninth century onwards. But these are territorially patchy; not every monastic archive survives, and not many towns have early records. In Italy and France, levels of documentation are better than in Spain, but Spain is better provided for than Britain. Documents do not help by telling us foundation dates, population

numbers and the employments of those people; rarely do they say much about the types of housing or farming, but they may tell us of the presence of vineyards, orchards, mills, woodland, boundaries, chapels and the like. What they usually show is that when documentation begins to re-emerge as an active form of recording and enacting from the ninth century, the landscape is relatively full: people farm, hunt and fish, villages and farms exist, places of rest and worship are known, and complex patterns of ownership, rental and sale prevail. The picture displayed in the Domesday Book for England reveals a full late Saxon-derived system of towns, manors, villages and hamlets; estate charters and placenames help further piece together the Saxon landscape, while sources such as the Burghal Hidage and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle present the rudiments for deciphering a planning of defensive townships or *burhs* from the later eighth and ninth centuries (see, for example, papers in Hooke, 1988, and her own volume, 1998).

At the other end of the timeframe under investigation, the late Roman, early Christian and late antique periods provide variable literary survivals and supports: narratives focus heavily on urban centres as these were the main points of military and political as well as religious attention; their fortunes obviously affected those of the countrysides attached to them, although often we gain little more than sweeping generalisations on plague, poor harvests and the like (some of these are covered in Christie, 1996a). Poetic contributions and letters are more personalised viewpoints and often proffer fuller images of rural life. Rutilius Namatianus, for example, at the start of the fifth century, in his *De Suo Reditu* recounts a journey from Rome to his damaged Gallic estates; on the journey by boat he describes ruinous or active towns, visits to still wealthy and hospitable villa owners, and he mentions village festivals, and robber-infested roads – in effect a patchwork of settlements and lands variously affected by warfare, insecurity, and economic disruption (such as the once busy port town of Cosa inhabited mainly by rats), and yet with zones where life goes on much as before. In the same period, the Younger Melania is recorded with vast estates within various provinces, including Britain, Gaul, Spain and Sicily, each served by multitudes of workers. The letters of Sidonius Apollinaris, meanwhile, reveal how in southern and south-western Gaul, villas remained powerful landscape features even in the late fifth century. These texts therefore tell us villas and farms are there, but it is rare to be able to tie a documented site into an excavated one.

Placenames may provide some human/natural/ethnic/functional/temporal guide, but frequently archaeology has to find its own chronologies and settlement roles for the landscape. Ceramics have long been the essential guide and, as noted, Roman manufactures and exports continued well beyond the fall of the Roman West and persist as sources for assessing periods and even the status of rural (and urban) settlement. Whereas in Britain Roman coin supply ceased with the reign of Honorius – yet may well have continued long

in circulation (though very frequently came to be hoarded instead) – on the continent coin production did not cease and Visigothic, Ostrogothic and Vandal kings duly minted their own issues, generally maintaining Roman styles, standards and issues (and alongside these we have the 'illegible' small change of fourth- to sixth-century date – too small to allow recognition). These appear with less frequency on sites in the fifth century, however, and are very rare in sixth-century contexts. For example, at the San Giusto villa in south east Italy (Volpe, 1998: 251–9), active chiefly from the fourth century into the seventh and with a peak in AD 500–550, of the 1100 coins, 605 were illegible; however, 1043 of these coins came from a hoard or church collection and in this group only 29 were sixth-century Germanic and Vandal issues, whilst some of the 'unidentified' coins may well be Byzantine issues of the late fifth/early sixth century. Another Italian villa example is M. Gelato, but this is perhaps unusual in having a good spread of coins across its lifespan, and in fact has very few coins before *c*. AD 350 (Potter and King, 1997: 236–41). A fairly typical urban context is Brescia, where the Santa Giulia excavations, uncovering pre-Roman to post-medieval contexts and including seventh-century houses, produced 1191 coins, of which 616 were legible, and of which 574 were Roman to early medieval in date. Just 7 per cent of the coins belonged to the fifth to seventh centuries (34 for the fifth century, 3 for both the sixth and seventh centuries); nearly 50 per cent, however, belonged to the period AD 364–402 (Arslan, 1999).

A simple reading of the archaeology for many villas based on the numismatic finds would thus posit extensive abandonment of villas at the end of the fourth or the start of the fifth century (cf. Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 322 for central north Italy between Verona and Mantua). This, of course, is often all that can be said from scattered finds, metal-detectored materials, plough material and early excavations; but wider recognition of the date ranges for ceramics, notably localised coarsewares, allows an extension to the sequences of villas or at least activity on/near them even if related (that is, new) buildings are not evident. A wider perspective often forces a revision of ideas: for the Verona zone, despite apparent 'ends' in the early fifth century, many villa sites witnessed later sixth- and seventh-century burials inserted into their ruins, or timber buildings constructed; and whilst some settlement/functional 'gap' is possible, the fact that the Roman centuriation system also persists instead recommends that continuity overall of sites and landscapes is likely (ibid.: 322).

Chronologies indeed are often insecure, due to obvious difficulties in dating materially impoverished layers, increasingly dependent on local and functional ceramics, and lacking coins. Our ability to perceive materials to create chronologies is, however, always improving (see, for example, work in the Farfa region north of Rome for the sixth and seventh centuries: Leggio and Moreland, 1986; Moreland, 1994; Gilkes *et al*., 1999). The problem is not

helped by the crude data surviving for interpreting the latest villa phases (notably due to old excavations ignoring or ignorant of latest/post-Roman items), meaning that we may be underestimating longevities – especially if we rely on the dates of mosaics to indicate final structural flourishes, since these may have remained in use for a century or so (in some cases even the dates of the mosaics themselves may need revisiting, as suggested for Aquitaine – see Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 94–5 with note 71, citing the example of Montmaurin, with proposed redating from the late fourth to the fifth or even sixth century AD). Likewise surface survey alone cannot provide coherent guides to underlying structural sequences, especially for periods of 'decay' or material impoverishment (cf. van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 134–7).

Figure 1.1 Fieldwalking in the Barkby Thorpe parish, Leicestershire – searching out traces of past land use and settlement from surface and sub-surface debris

Rural Populations – Figures and Presences

Such chronological and material concerns also impact on our expectation and awareness of 'late' populations. For the main Roman period these concerns are less prominent, given the extensive trade and production networks that so aid in recognising Roman activities. As Millett (1991: 18) has argued, field surveys have indeed radically revised previous estimates of Roman rural population figures. But he stresses problems in supply and availability and in

the ability of individuals to purchase traded goods, which may all have implications for the better 'visibility' or 'overvisibility' of a population through ceramics in certain phases of the Roman world (ibid.: 20, noting the perhaps artificial high in South Etruria in AD 100, and suggesting the late Republican period population was conceivably at the same level). Most particularly it raises the issue for the late antique and post-Roman periods when a recognised economic shrinkage meant that whilst trade continued, only well-to-do and military customers remain as easily visible recipients; a greater frequency of regional imitations and thence local wares makes for a weaker image of other sectors of society, especially less well-off farmers. With the accepted decline in the ceramic industries from the sixth century and the reversion in the majority of regions to a more domestic mode of production, this archaeological visibility of the (internal) rural – and even the urban – population becomes even less tangible (cf. Moreland, 1994; Gelichi, 2000; Wickham, 1998; Gutiérrez Lloret, 1998a and 1998b for clear images of production and demand in fifth- to seventh-century eastern Spain). But this does not mean populations had gone, fled, shifted, or become devoid of material culture: the value of many field surveys and excavations has been to seek ways of filling this apparent material gap, to enhance knowledge of 'ordinary' wares, to recognise local fabrics and styles, and so to people the early medieval landscapes (see, for example, the valuable contributions in Saguì, 1998, such as Patterson and Roberts, Brogiolo and Gelichi). This is equally true for townscapes, where in the seventh and eighth centuries in Spain and Italy, for example, we hear of churches, monasteries, repairs to city walls, religious meetings, political disputes and the like, and yet only in a few instances have we houses, bodies, ceramics, coins to show real people actively living in these towns (see papers in Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, 1998; Brogiolo *et al*., 2000). Even then, for early seventh-century Brescia in central north Italy, a former Roman city then with Lombard duke, we have traces of a community of *c*. 50 individuals in one eastern sector of the city, and only scattered burials from elsewhere – hardly sufficient to call this an 'urban' population (Brogiolo, 1993: 85–96). There are signs here in fact of cultivation and animal husbandry inside the walled space: conceivably, on a negative level, one might take this to show massive depopulation of both town and country and a ruralisation of the urban space; indeed, this cultivation and dark soil in Brescia seems best attested for the mid-seventh century *after* the noted settlement activity.

Text and archaeology do not always tell the same story with regard to populations and lands – or, in the case of documentary data, sometimes historians and archaeologists take words too much at face value (as likewise the evidence of – or lack of – dots on distribution maps). A good example of the problem exists for Samnium, central east Italy, modern Molise, for which in the fifth century we hear of waste- and abandoned lands or *agri deserti*, for

the mid-seventh century Paul the Deacon refers to *loca deserta*, whilst the *silva densissima* and its wild animals were, in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, suitably serious obstacles to various monks (De Benedittis, 1995: 331–2; cf. Lloyd, 1995: 252–3). The Biferno survey (Barker, ed., 1995) countered this bleak image through discovery of a busy Roman landscape, in which a number of villas and farms persisted into the sixth century; even with the seventh and eighth centuries at least a few defensive and religious sites could be identified. Excavations at the villa site of Casalpiano near Morrone encapsulate much of this rural sequence: a possible farmstead of the second century BC, followed by a small first-century BC villa, which later gained a bathsuite; the villa continued perhaps into the fifth century and then appears to have become abandoned. However, a sixth-century cemetery (perhaps extending into the seventh) then was imposed over the site, largely respecting the walls, with tombs resting also on the floors of some rooms; the earth-cut and slab-covered graves contained few furnishings, although one coin of the 570s was recovered; hearths nearby may suggest adjoining houses relating to a farm – linked, presumably, to the early medieval toponym, Casalpiano. By AD 1000 two Benedictine churches existed on the site, conceivably connected to an earlier shrine or chapel around which the first burials had been gathered. Only part of the site was excavated, but the fifty or so graves identified testify to at least a consistent, if small farming community. This community was, in effect, revealed only through the tombs, and through detailed excavation, but with precious little in the way of settlement archaeology; the same situation prevails, it seems, for sixth-century Monte Gelato and San Vincenzo (see below) and is no doubt valid elsewhere. We might argue for an early medieval rural population, but they may be elusive without excavation.

Villas: Society and (D)Evolution in the Late Empire

We must be cautious in discussing population loss in the countryside, since too frequently this loss is registered with the demise of the bigger villas – if these go out of use one assumes that the land and tenant farmers accompanying those estates also suffer. In reality, the loss of an architectural unit like a fine villa marks merely a prominent result of changing socio-economic conditions; there is no reason to think that the owner ordered abandonment of its lands, since that owner most probably moved back into a town/city and still required income and food from that estate. The insecurity was enough to scare away the wealth of the noble but might not have deeply affected lesser peasant farmers (cf. Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 315–16; van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 154). The evidence for continued economic activity on some sites (and often inside former residential spaces) in terms of furnaces, storage areas, and vats may thus denote a redefinition not loss of a site.

Nonetheless, villas still dominate our image of the landscape of the Roman world – they remain the best studied archaeologically since their remains are easier to find and archaeologically more rewarding. Many, however, were dug purely with Roman explanations and contexts in mind, with too little consideration of their ends and possible continuities. With the extension of field survey projects and the resultant contextualisation of villas in broader landscapes and settlement systems, far more can now be said of their roles. Indeed, for the late Empire many such villas took on very prominent social roles, with larger estates formulated and the elite investing more in their structural plans and internal (and presumably external) ornamentation – with a shift of interest *away* from towns which appear, archaeologically, to be in relative decline from the fourth century. This transfer of interest nonetheless occurs in what we still frequently perceive as a period of insecurity, with reinforcement of frontiers, greater military emphasis and a fortification of all major towns. Texts such as the laws incorporated within the *Codex Theodosianus* in fact, for some districts, paint an image of powerful estate owners, with armed bodies of workers and retainers, somehow detached from the law; and yet verse and letters by authors such as Rutilius Namatianus and Sidonius Apollinaris instead refer to fine architectural and natural vistas, poetry recitals, cultural and epicurial contemplations, and even monastic retreats (for the society of the countryside in the late Roman/early Byzantine East, see the volume by Banaji, 2001, stressing overall investment and vitality).

The villa 'outburst' of the fourth century is matched by an outward display of opulence: architectural expansion and the deliberate elevation of the host through the creation of elaborate apsidal (or triconch) dining halls, through the presentation of fine works of art, and through the laying out of fine, message-charged mosaic floors (and presumably to go with these, fine, but now largely lost wall paintings and hangings, plus extensive libraries) (in general, Arce, 1997; Scott, 2000 on Britain and, more widely, in this volume, with bibliography). Some of this late elaboration is now being properly re-visualised through new excavations and through re-analysis of excavated villa sites, ranging from Piazza Armerina in Sicily and Desenzano in north Italy, to Montmaurin in France, and to Woodchester in England (Figs. 1.4, 2.1, 2.2). Importantly, such discussions are increasingly searching to place such villas in a wider landscape context.

In Italy, many villas seem to peak in the course of the mid-fourth to mid-fifth century – thus somewhat later than the peaks recognised for Gaul, Germany, Britain and Spain, although for Spain and southern Gaul, many villas remain at a quality level into the sixth century. As noted, some problems in chronology exist even in assessing these peaks, since we rely too heavily on extant art and architecture which may mark simply the start of opulence, which may have persisted and even been expanded through mobile (and now lost) art.

In Lucania, southern Italy, extensive excavations at the villa of San Giovanni di Ruoti indicate sizeable rebuilding of an early imperial farm in the course of the fifth century, and with the second half of that century particularly distinguished by mosaics and by an imposing apsed dining hall set on a first floor level. Here villa wealth derived most probably from the pig trade, supplying Naples and Rome, as appears attested by sizeable quantities of pig bone in the middens; these latter nonethelesss show a preponderance of local ceramic wares with few clear imports (Small and Buck, 1994; Arthur, 1997). In this case the villa extends 'beyond Rome' and is active under the Ostrogothic regime. In its final phase, however, the owner may have resided elsewhere as more modest structures were added and rubbish dumping was less controlled; nonetheless, it remains a busy site, clearly strongly involved in local and regional exchange. The final demise of the site appears to have come with the insecurities and disrupted markets of the Gothic War (AD 533–554).

Even at the badly destroyed and heavily robbed large villa site at Castle Copse in Wiltshire, England, excavations from 1983–86 (see Walters, 1998) were able to piece together enough to show a sizeable estate centre occupying a prominent hilltop position, endowed with good quality mosaics and buildings of some architectural pretensions; for the fourth-century phase the animal bones (including fish and bird) support an image of 'sumptuous feasting'. But here too there are indications of life persisting beyond this opulence, materially less apparent, but still impacting on the local territory.

Church and Landscapes

Although barely perceptible in Britain, various continental monumental villas are marked also by the presence of churches or chapels (generally) in their latest phases. Is this a straightforward Christianisation of the site's owners, or does it denote the transfer in the owner's lifetime or with the owner's death to Church or monastic control? Or is this the reoccupation of an abandoned site by Church or by monks – the latter with or without local/regional/episcopal permission? What roles did such churches or chapels have – private, estate or parish? And why these sites – location, size, materials, or local population? We might then question whether private church/chapel building was an effort by an elite to show conversion, to keep up with the ascetic fashion, in response to demands from others, or even another way of displaying wealth – that is, a final burst of private architectural and artistic exhibitionism and authority. The question is complex and little studied as yet (cf. Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 107–111. For the Christianisation of rural northern Italy see the valuable paper by Cantino Wataghin, 2000).

For Italy three diverse examples can be briefly noted. The first at Monte Gelato, north of Rome, comprised an Augustan period courtyard-villa which

developed slowly in the second century AD, only then to be systematically dismantled in the early third century. Revival of the site in a very functional form in the mid-fourth century was followed soon after by construction of a small church, whose build stands out from the other structures. The assumption here is that the land had come into Church hands. This small settlement and working unit persisted into the sixth century before apparent loss after the Gothic War. Foundation of a larger church (with baptistery) and community in the early ninth century can be viewed as a renewal of Church control over this property (Potter and King, 1997).

In a second example, San Giusto in Puglia, a site now beneath a dam, a busy residential villa developed in the fourth century from a small earlier farm. In the fifth century a wholly new focus was imposed through construction of a church complex including narthex and baptistery, with stunning polychrome geometric mosaics; in the early sixth century a second sizeable church was added, with a cemeterial role (Volpe, 1998). Whilst the first church is burnt down between *c*. AD 550–625, the second persists, with repairs to the baptistery and tombs cutting into the narthex. Impoverished activity is attested in the seventh century, marked by rough buildings against the narthex and areas of collapse, and a more haphazard series of burials before eventual abandonment. In this case, we see a 'parish' role created in the late Empire, implying again Church ownership, but here the quality of the churches and their size (the first church was of 30.5 x 18.5m; its baptistery of 16m diameter) may indicate an episcopal seat.

A third example in fact comprises a group of Italian sites at which a monastic presence can be recognised (see discussion in Barnish, 1995). The *Chronicon* of San Vincenzo recounts a first foundation by three Lombard brothers in the early eighth century on a ruinous but ancient oratory hidden in dense woodland; excavations beneath the ninth-century remains, however, have revealed an earlier site, as well as a late Roman villa with church; potentially this early Christian church was a monastic foundation, perhaps installed by the villa owner (Hodges, 1997). The Lombard brothers had visited the (then) new monastery of Farfa north-east of Rome before being dispatched to San Vincenzo; here too tradition recounts a monastery founded in the sixth century in a wild and desolate spot, again within an older structure; again excavations point to a late Roman villa with likely chapel/monastic content in the fifth century (see Gilkes *et al*., 1999: 270–71). Finally, the Ostrogothic chief minister, Cassiodorus, in the early sixth century established at his estate of *Vivarium* (Squillace – right on the foot of Italy) a monastic community with a *scriptorium* to enhance religious scholarship. Excavations have uncovered part of the estate centre and the linked church at Copanello (Bougard and Noyé, 1989). In effect, a monastic status or community could exist with a secular one, be attached to this in the villa's lifetime, take over a villa site, or be founded over the remains of one

(wherein walls, courtyards, and terraces would provide ideal foundations – as attested also for St Benedict's monastic seats at Subiaco on the remains of Nero's villa).

In the latter cases, Christianisation of ruinous, secular structures is mainly occurring. In early Saxon Britain, the new Christian Church and its monks were content to utilise the past in a like way (Bell, 1998): in the sixth century, monasteries and churches were erected in some of the derelict Saxon Shore forts – for example, Richborough, Bradwell; in Italy various pagan temples – notably the Pantheon in Rome – came to be transformed into churches, but this was primarily in the seventh century. In Britain there are some instances of former villa sites being chosen for churches, although whether this relates to extant walls, available materials, local memory of older sanctity, or simple topographic coincidence is never clear – at least without full-scale excavation. For example, in Rutland in the Gwash valley, a group of five middle Saxon (presumed Christian) burials cut down carefully into the floor of a former Roman villa (Empingham site 2) which arguably was a chapel converted from a (ruinous but largely upstanding?) ancient structure (Cooper, 2000: 20–22).

In Spain, the coincidence of villa with/to church is much stronger and better studied archaeologically. An important example is provided at Fraga (Huesca) where the *villa Fortunatus*, of third-century origin, was, in the early fifth century, provided with a church in its south-western quarter; a likely *martyrium* suggests this was a private oratory, but this role was probably changed in the mid-fifth-century reworking of the building with added apse, loculus and baptistery, implying a transition to 'official' parish church (Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 75–7, who also record the site of Sao Cucufate in Portugal with a monastery imposed over the fifth-century church in the eighth century). At Torre de Palma in east central Portugal an earlier Christian foundation occurs, since mid-fourth-century coins were found in the floor of the double-apsed church located 100m north west of the villa (and significantly sited over the villa burial plot and over a possible shrine). Renewal in the late fourth or early fifth century witnessed the addition of a baptistery, whilst in the fifth-century 'Visigothic' phase up to 100 burials gathered around this basilica (Maloney and Hale, 1996: 290–93).

For Gaul the physical link between villa and church or monastery is not always watertight, even if the incidence rate between these is high (Percival, 1976: 183–9); texts do at least support the link: Knight (1999: 126) refers to the so far undiscovered estate villa of *Primuliacum* in south-west Gaul, whose owner, Sulpicius Severus, in *c*. AD 400 added a second church and linked this to an existing chapel via a baptistery – this latter implying a private church seeking or gaining parish status. Again the task is with archaeology to help secure the link between late Roman/late antique and early medieval activity.

Defence, War and Loss

Such studies have accordingly also made us more aware of villa/farm fates, prompting revised thinking of relationships and ends. A problem remains, however, in the continued reliance on documented events in which to frame changes of loss, mainly since such events provide 'tidy' explanations. Certainly, the impact of documented warfare on landscapes can be visualised archaeologically in instances of destruction horizons, final coin loss, hoards – as evident in the Alf valley near Trier related to the events of AD 353–355 – although one must be cautious in assuming finite, lasting effects since many areas which suffered raids and looting often appear to show persistent (or renewed) activity (van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 138). But loss through accidental fire, or property confiscation might also register a violent end, not necessarily connected to a known historical (and military) event. Whilst some ancient narratives are sweeping in their statements of rural loss and urban destruction, on some occasions the veracity of graphic war loss appears to ring true: hence for the sixth century, the Byzantine historian Procopius, chronicling the brutal and extended conflict with the Ostrogoths in Italy, reports dramatic loss of life in towns and the wiping out of 50 000 farmers in Picenum through famine; the wide-ranging conflict has been linked to the loss of various villas and other sites (for example, San Vincenzo, San Giovanni, Monte Gelato – Christie, 1996a: 271).

Warfare is similarly used to explain instances of *agri deserti* – well attested in the *Codex Theodosianus* for central and southern Italy in the fifth century and explicitly linked to the devastations of Visigothic and later Vandal assaults (for example, *Codex Theod*. 11.28.2 for AD 395 recording 1332 km^2 of 'deserted and unkempt' lands). We need not view such lands as prime agricultural areas; many may have been marginal, upland or drained units; *agri deserti* may also result from new management strategies, mergings of scattered lands and farms, or simply tax avoidance ruses. Some 'waste' had emerged in the 'crisis' of the second and third centuries AD, when landholding suffered. Mancassola and Saggioro claim to have recognised such abandoned lands in one of their Veronese study zones (2000: 322–6), suggesting that this was one area that needed reviving by Sarmatian 'tributari' (ex-prisoners of war) in the fourth century. Indeed, settlement of captured enemies or allies (*laeti*) was one tactic adopted to repopulate or revitalise land across various northern parts of the Empire, extending also in north Italy. So far in Italy there are no clear instances of 'Germanic'-style farms or villages on Roman soil associated with these resettled communities, even if placenames help document their presence; but burials of 'Germanic' and military character are recognisable from the mid-fourth century in Gaul (notably between the Rhine, Seine and Moselle and along the Meuse and Aisne valleys) and Spain (for example, along the Duero) (Cracco Ruggini, 1984: 24–38; James, 1988: 38–9, 44–51).

We cannot deny, however, a modified Empire from the third and fourth centuries: more military emperors, fortified towns, a damaged monetary economy, and reduced public display by the elite. Furthermore, tightened frontier activities and a stronger military presence imply a strong sense of insecurity across many western provinces (though, by contrast, urban defence programmes are much delayed in the East). How did this insecurity impact on the look of the countryside and can we make a direct link between change and insecurity? We must of course be cautious in this: whilst it is easy to proffer a blanket image of insecurity and militarisation, we must note that areas varied in terms of military presence, strategic worth (for example, communications), agricultural productivity, and settlement levels, and that many zones probably never suffered from raids by enemies or Roman soldiery. Certainly we should expect a more direct and earlier response, arguably, in a frontier zone (as suggested for the lands along the Lower Danube, where rural Roman sites appear completely lost by *c.* AD 400: Conrad and Stančev, 2002) than in inner provinces. We might also question what is meant by the terms 'insecurity' and 'militarisation': insecurity signifies a state of uncertainty and a lack of protection, but need not be long term; longer-term insecurity, marked perhaps by movements of troops, demands on the land for supplies, enforced recruitment, might require a more organised consideration of communal and local safety; militarisation, by contrast, implies involvement by the authorities to secure a zone, through provision of towers or forts, billetting of troops and closer overseeing of local populations to ensure supplies of food to the army (cf. Dunn, 2002; Poulter, Chapter 8 of this volume. The so-called 'inner fortresses' of Pannonia – western Hungary – such as Fenekpuszta at the south-western end of lake Balaton, which emerge from the AD 320s, are a possible instance of such 'militarised' landscapes: massive circuit walls protect rectangular spaces containing granaries, church(es), and villa-like residences. Studies are not advanced enough to show if these are fortifications of existing villas, new format imperial estates, or army bases geared to collect and store the *annona*: Christie, 1996b).

Bearing this in mind, we might seek settlement responses on state, private and also communal levels. A first example comprises the Brioni islands off the Istrian peninsula (Dalmatia) (Schrunk and Begović, 2000), featuring some high-class resort villas, of likely senatorial holding in the early empire – then as now a luxury aristocratic retreat. The region was still renowed for its fine villas (*praetoria*) in the time of Cassiodorus in the 530s AD (*Var.* XII, 22), but one site, 'Castrum' on the west flank of Brioni Grande in the bay of Dobrinka, is remarkable for its defensive enclosure, of likely fifth- and sixth-century phases. Whilst the villas as resorts may have peaked in the first centuries AD, there is clear continuity into the fifth/sixth century: the extensive luxury villa of Verige on the east side of the island featured a church with baptistery (and burials) from the later fourth century, although